

Georgia Department of Human Resources

OFFICE OF INVESTIGATIVE SERVICES

The Office of Investigative Services was established in 1979 to investigate fraud in public assistance programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), food stamps and childcare. The office also investigates suspected employee misconduct and misuse of funds within DHR and by anyone contracted to DHR. In FY 2007, the office:

- Investigated 9,102 cases of suspected fraud;
- Discovered \$8.7 million in TANF, food stamp, and childcare overpayments due to fraud, all of which must be repaid.

In FY 2007, the office:

- Ranked #1 in the Southeast in the number of intentional program violation (IPV) claims established in the Food Stamps program with 3,508 claims.
- Ranked #1 in the Southeast in IPV claims dollars collected in the Food Stamps program with \$4.7 million
- Ranked #2 in the Southeast in the dollar amount of fraud claims established in IPV in Food Stamps with \$6 million.

The Office of Investigative Services Administrative Office, Internal Investigations, Background Investigations and Enforcement Units are located at 2 Peachtree Street, Atlanta, GA 30303. Two regional offices are also located at 2 Peachtree. Seven other regional offices are located throughout the state in Albany, Cartersville, Columbus, Gainesville, Macon, Savannah, and Douglas. The office has 108 staff positions and a budget of nearly \$7.2 million.

Public assistance program fraud

Local departments of Family and Children Services contact the Office of Investigative Services to report suspected fraud. Each report is assigned to a regional investigator. The investigator conducts an investigation to determine whether an overpayment or fraud exists. Fraud occurs when a person withholds or falsifies information to receive public assistance for which he or she is not eligible.

Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card trafficking occurs when a person sells their food stamp benefits for cash or services other than food. This can occur in a variety of ways. The most common is when a recipient goes to a vendor and with that vendor's cooperation swipes the EBT card for a specific dollar value. The vendor then gives the recipient cash for less than the amount deducted from the card. No actual sale has transpired and the vendor keeps the majority of the amount deducted from the client's card.

During FY 2007, a total of \$1.68 million in fraud claims were established in the childcare program. Childcare program funding has increased with welfare reform and has resulted in a noticeable increase in overpayments. Childcare fraud occurs when people withhold or falsify information to receive subsidized childcare benefits for which they are not eligible. Fraud also occurs when the benefits are not paid to the authorized provider, the providers bill for children they do not keep, or clients fail to report a change in their working status.

Cases of overpayment due to agency or client error are forwarded to the Division of Family and Children Services for collection. Cases involving client fraud are adjudicated

through either an administrative disqualification hearing or the judicial system, depending on the amount of fraud and the number of violations the client has.

All overpayments, regardless of type, must be repaid. In fraudulent cases that are adjudicated, clients are disqualified for varying periods depending on whether it is their first, second or third violation and on whether they are convicted in court, sign a consent agreement, or have an administrative hearing. Successful adjudication of fraud cases not only recovers the overpayments in public assistance, but also saves money through program disqualification.

Internal investigations

Additionally, the Office of Investigative Services investigates allegations of employee misconduct and misuse of funds for all DHR divisions and offices. During FY 2007, 62 internal investigations were completed.

Background Investigations

The OIS also conducts criminal history background checks for all areas of DHR. This includes applicants selected for employment, assisting DFCS in CPS investigations and emergency placement of children, all foster care applicants, and all required record checks for licensed facilities. These facilities include Personal Care Homes, Child Placing Agencies, Outdoor Therapeutic Programs, and Residential Childcare facilities. In FY 2007, OIS Background Investigations conducted 26,422 employment applicant background checks, 20,482 CPS assistance background checks, 3,307 foster care applicant checks, and 3,634 regulated facilities background checks.

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Office of Communications
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